

15th-ranked Hawkeyes silenced by Spartans

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – The script was supposed to go differently for Iowa this time around, or at least it seemed.

Ranked 15th nationally, the Hawkeyes played a decimated Michigan State squad in front of a sell-out crowd inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena on Tuesday. Sure, the Spartans had won each of the previous six meetings coming into this game. But Michigan State was missing two of its best players in Adreian Payne and Branden Dawson.

Throw in every other intangible possible and the stage was set for Iowa to finally secure a win over a team that had its number. But it wasn't able to.

Once again, it was the seventh-ranked Spartans, not the Hawkeyes, emerging victorious. It took overtime, but Michigan State managed to escape with a 71-69 overtime win over Iowa that dropped the Hawkeyes to 5-3 in the Big Ten and 16-5 overall.

"It's frustrating losing to the same team in kind of the same way," junior guard Josh Oglesby said after a third straight loss to Michigan State dating back to last season where the Spartans took control in the closing minutes.

The story of this game was simply the final 15 minutes – the last 10 minutes of regulation and the five-minute overtime period. At the 9:56 mark of the second half, senior forward Zach McCabe knocked down a 3-pointer that extended a one-point lead up to four at 50-46. Iowa's next bucket didn't come until

a conventional 3-point play from senior guard Devyn Marble with six seconds left in overtime.

When Iowa did score over that 14:50 stretch without a field goal however, it wasn't without missed chances. Seventeen of the Hawkeyes' final 19 points came at the free-throw line, but they also missed five free-throw attempts during that field-goal drought and 13 attempts for the entire game after shooting 30-of-43.

Conversely, Michigan State took nearly half of its shots from behind the arc and finished 10-of-29 from 3-point range. But the two that will be remembered most were the two 3s knocked down by the Spartans in overtime.

The first was by Keith Appling and gave Michigan State a 64-63 lead, one that it would continue to hold onto the rest of the way. The second occurred with 34 seconds remaining when Russell Byrd hit a 3-pointer from the corner to put the Spartans ahead 70-64.

Iowa's play down the stretch ultimately led to head coach Fran McCaffery questioning his team's toughness afterwards.

"We've got to challenge guys to be better than they are," McCaffery said.

Following that aforementioned 3-point play from Marble (who had a game-high 21 points in defeat), Appling missed a pair of free throws and Iowa got the ball back and called timeout with 4.4 seconds remaining. Sophomore guard Mike Gesell found a lane, drove for a game-tying lay-up in the closing seconds, but wasn't able to convert and force a second overtime.

"I felt like I didn't have time to pass it for a 3," Gesell said. "In that situation, you just have to get a good or at least a decent look at the basket. Coach drew up a pretty good play and I thought I could get to the hoop.

"I just wasn't able to finish it."

Iowa will attempt bouncing back on Feb. 1 when it makes a historically unfriendly visit to Illinois for a tilt with the Fighting Illini at the State Farm Center in Champaign, Ill. Tip-off is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Central and the game will be televised nationally on the Big Ten Network. Illinois enters having lost six straight, but the Hawkeyes' have one victory (1998-99) in Champaign since 1987.

"You've just got to re-focus your energy toward the next team," Marble said. "We'll get ready in practice and listen to what the coaching staff has to say for the game plan and then go in there with the confidence that we normally show and normally play with."

"Guys have just got to step up and make plays."